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THE HOUSE OF CHARITY AND ITS WORK.

n.d.

A SERMON,

BY THE

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THE HOUSE OF CHARITY AND ITS WORK.

Matt. XXV, v. 40 —“*And the King shall answer and say unto them, ‘Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.’*”

IF we were not dealing here with the words of the Son of God, with words which set forth the most awful realities of our own doom, we might be tempted to pause at that judgment scene, of which this is but a single verse, and admire the wondrous skill by which with a few simple strokes the sublimest picture has been drawn. Others, and those not mean adepts in the art of moving their fellows, in describing that great day have exhausted in prodigal profusion the utmost resources of their art, have been themselves borne away by the mighty passion of those scenes which they were pourtraying. Not so the Divine Speaker here; He moves calmly, as among familiar things ; uses the simplest, the commonest, the most every-day images, to set forth the vastest, the strangest, the most tremendous truths. A mingled flock of sheep and goats (and such are frequent in the East,) mingled during the day, and feeding in

the same pastures, but at evening separated and sun-dered from one another, folded apart and in different pens, this simple pastoral image suffices *Him* for the setting forth the present mixed condition of the Church,—good men and evil, faithful and unfaith-
ful, in the same outward fellowship and communion, but in the end divided from one another, good gathered only with good, and bad with bad, when at His decisive word, all the light shall be gathered upon one side, and all the darkness on the other ; and saved and lost, righteous and wicked, shall stand severally at the right hand and left of His throne.

And in setting forth the principles which shall regulate this final distribution and separation, the same simple grandeur reigns. We have Christian piety in its primary elements ; and men are divided and doomed according to a single law, as they were merciful or unmerciful, according as their faith wrought itself out in active deeds of love to their brethren ; or testified that it was *no* faith, but only a lifeless imitation of faith, in that it was barren and unfruit-
ful of these.

Let us consider a little, and in that order in which we find them, the two great judgment acts which are here described. The King is sitting upon His throne ; the nations are gathered before Him ; the trumpet of a great sound has summoned them from

the four corners of the earth, and from His lips they await their doom ; a doom already ominously fore-shewn in the places which they occupy, on the right or on the left, good by a natural affinity having gathered to good, and evil to evil. And then He to whom mercy is a welcome, as judgment is a strange work, addresses Himself first to those who are the objects of *His* mercy, as others had been the objects of theirs. He pronounces them the blessed of His Father ; He declares that in manifold ways they had ministered to Him, fed Him when He was hungry, clothed Him when He was naked, visited Him when He was sick, sheltered Him when He was houseless. Merciful themselves, they shall obtain mercy in turn, and He bids them to enter into the Kingdom prepared for them from the beginning of the world. Very remarkable is the joyful surprise, the glad perplexity with which this announcement is received. He is ascribing to them an honour too great and high for them with any right to appropriate to themselves. There may have been indeed in the days of His flesh, when for a while He tabernacled upon earth, holy women and devout men, a Mary or a Martha, a Joseph or a Nicodemus, who ministered to Him of their substance, received Him gladly under their roof, or laid Him reverently in their tombs ; but *we*, "when saw we Thee hungry and fed Thee, a stranger and took Thee in, sick or in prison, and

came unto Thee?" Counting little of what they had done, they cannot understand how *He* should count so much ; not imputing it to themselves as righteousness, they were not prepared that He should so impute it of His grace; while yet it was just because they *had* thought so little, that therefore their Lord had thought so much ; because they *had* forgotten, that therefore He had not forgotten; because they had written their deeds of mercy and love as in water, that He had written them in the book of His everlasting remembrance.

And may we not derive from hence, my brethren, a precious assurance, an earnest motive to be always abounding in the work of the Lord ? For what if the day of judgment be a dreadful day, wherein all hidden things of dishonesty and all unfruitful works of shame shall be brought to light and put to open shame ; it is a day as well in which all hidden things of righteousness, all deeds of light, which yet have shunned the light with no less care than if they had been deeds of darkness, shall be manifested too. The act of self-denial, unmarked by any except him that did it, the sacrifice of self-will unnoticed here, but not unnoticed in Heaven, the wrestling, as of Jacob with the Angel, even to the break of day, the alms which the right hand did and the left hand never knew, all these shall be brought forward, shall be drawn from the secrecy which they had chosen ; for that God with whom we have to do is not un-

righteous to forget the smallest labour of love that is wrought for His Name's sake. And thought more precious still, motive which might well prove stronger yet, to provoke us to love and good works, whatever has been done to the least of Christ's brethren, to the least of those whose nature He assumed, He shall then impute it as done to Himself—"inasmuch as ye did it to the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto Me." It is He, the Lord of Glory Himself, whom in this naked one we clothe, in this stranger we take in, in this sick we visit or relieve. We hear of some, of whom in the olden time it is said that they entertained Angels unawares. Angels and more than Angels, even Him who is the Lord of Angels as of men, we may entertain, if only we will. As we walk up and down in the world, He meets us in his suffering members; He offers Himself to us under manifold disguises—strange and unlikely, squalid, sordid, repulsive these disguises may often be, but still *He* is there, to be detected by the eye of faith, to be ministered unto by the hand of love. Oh, what an immeasurable dignity would such a thought as this impart to each lowliest service of love, if only we would realize it (which who among us does?) to the full!

But the truth which Christ has been declaring here, has also its sterner and sadder side; which He does not shrink from declaring as well. "Blessed are

the merciful," contains in it as a necessary consequence and complement, "Cursed are the unmerciful." God's love of good is also His hatred of evil; His pleasure in righteousness *is* itself His displeasure at unrighteousness. God's love to good, and hatred of evil are not two different qualities or attributes in Him, but only two different manifestations of one and the same supreme moral energy, rejoicing in that which is like, repelling that which is unlike, to its own perfect self. A God of love must also be a God of anger; He cannot truly love the good without being also a hater of evil; He cannot be a rewarder of one who is not also a punisher of the other. "Our God is love," and "Our God is a consuming fire," so far from contradicting one another, would not be true the one without the other. And therefore there must needs follow on Christ's "Come ye blessed of my Father," another and a sadder word, "Depart from Me, ye cursed. Ye have chosen to abide at a distance from Me, and now take for ever that which ye have chosen. My love to you awoke no answering love upon your parts toward Me, or toward My brethren and yours. The kingdom of love rejects you, as you have rejected it. Be filled with your own doings. Be gathered under your own Head, under the banner of him who is the prince of lust and selfishness and pride, as I am the Prince of purity, of humility and of love, and would fain have gathered you under Mine."

And then, brethren, very wonderful it is to observe that exactly as the faithful could think no good of themselves, these can think no evil ; as those exclaim, "When *did* we serve Thee ?" so these, "When did we *not* ?" A fearful commentary, and one which may well lead to earnest heartsearching, on the words of the Psalmist, "The ungodly flattereth himself in his own eyes, till his abominable sin be found out," as again on the words of the wise man, that all the ways of a man may be clear in his own eyes, while yet the end thereof is death. Of this, however, only by the way. But wherein did the source and secret of this their fearful mistake about themselves, of this miserable delusion, not dissipated until it was too late, consist ? It consisted in this : they tried themselves not by the measure of the good which they had left undone, not by the measure of their *omitted* duties, but only of their *committed* sins. These wicked, these cruel and unmerciful, these whom the Lord rejects, whom He puts away like dross, even while He gathers up others as the pure gold into His treasure-house, they are not those who have had positive pleasure in other men's pains, not the active tormentors of the bodies or spirits of men, not those who had pitilessly used up and consumed their brethren for the gratification of their own lust and pride, or the heaping up wealth in their own storehouses. Their guilt is nothing so strong and marked as that of such would be. The unmerciful

of Scripture are just those who have stood aloof, looking on and yielding no help, while the world went upon its miserable way, who have wrapped themselves close in the garment of their own selfishness, for were they, they said, their brother's keepers? who, like Dives, has fed without fear, while a Lazarus was lying, hungering and full of sores, at their gate. "*Because ye did it not*"—this is their condemnation; it is this which Christ lays to their charge. And then too, that very thing which added so unutterable a price to each act of faithful love, I mean Christ's presence in his redeemed, adds also an unutterable guilt to every omission and neglect of the same. "*I* was in those afflicted ones from whom you hid your eyes, or, seeing whom, you passed by on the other side. *I* lay hungering in the porch when you did not see me; *I* stood shivering at the gate when ye did not clothe me; *I* was stretched upon the bed of sickness or of mortal pain, when no hand of yours was stretched out to succour and to save. Because ye did it not to the least of these My brethren, ye did it not unto *Me*." But enough, brethren, by way of general introduction. Whatever time may remain to us, I would bestow upon the immediate subject which is brought before our notice to-day, at the same time beseeching you not to disconnect what will be spoken from what has been; but to remember ever the blessedness and glory of ministering to those whom Christ has redeemed, or rather to Him

in them ; the dreadful guilt and awful doom of indulging in that spirit of selfishness and hardness of heart which would cause us to leave these ministrations undone.

The "House of Charity," whose claims I bring before you to-day, is a charity which has some peculiar features of its own, such as at once present themselves to the notice of every one who considers what the field of its operations is, and such as broadly distinguish it from every other charitable institution in this metropolis. The feature which eminently distinguishes it is the freedom of operation which it has reserved for itself. I do not mean to deny that it is most valuable and important that other charities, that most charities should have their well-defined fields of labour, their special ministrations to some special want and woe of our suffering humanity; that one, for instance, should seek to alleviate the sufferings of the blind; another to smooth the path of the consumptive to their grave; a third to treat the sufferings and diseases of children; well too, that they should not seek to overstep the limits which they have laid down for themselves, or be tempted to intrude into another line of things. Yet at the same time there is an inconvenience, even a danger, in this appropriation by different charitable institutions of their own special work, joined with the resolution not to travel beyond this. The inconve-

nience is this. The forms of human suffering, of human need, are so infinite, they take such unexpected shapes, they rise up from such unlooked-for quarters, that it is quite impossible beforehand to reduce them all under any fixed formulas and schemes. There is real danger therefore, nay, there is a certainty, that multiply as you will the charities with rigid rules laid down beforehand in regard of the sufferings which they shall seek to alleviate, after all is done, much will be left out, much will be left unprovided for.

Here, then, the House of Charity steps in; and I should not fear to call it, nor consider that I am praising it too highly if I called it, a supplement to all the other public charities of London. Its essential character is its elasticity, its power of adapting itself to any and every emergent need. There is almost no form of human woe or distress which comes amiss to it—almost none which it by its very constitution is obliged to repel from its gates. The poor convalescent, dismissed from the hospital as cured, but still faint and weak from recent disease, here finds for a little that nourishment and rest so greatly needed at such a time; the young man in search of employment, who has come to London, and whose little funds are exhausted before he has found that which he was in search of, may here be enabled to prolong his search, and meet others, who with more

influence and a wider range of vision, will help him in it; those suddenly, and by no fault of their own, thrown out of employment, as by a great fire, or by the death or bankruptcy of an employer; friendless persons waiting in this great city weary days or weeks, till the ship which shall carry them to some more hospitable coast, shall sail—these have often found here a temporary home. But I cannot enumerate all its various ministrations of help, yet one very characteristic feature of this institution I would fain bring to your notice. I speak not of the earnest ministrations of its Chaplain, as he seeks to make the time of sorrow or anxiety a time for deepening and strengthening the spiritual life of the inmates of this House, for this we may thank God it has in common with many; but I would rather call your attention to the constant efforts of the conductors of this Institution to be *permanently* useful to those whom they help, to assist them into places where henceforward they may be able to help themselves, and the singular success which has attended their efforts in this direction, indicating on their part a wisdom, an energy, a labour of love, for which we may well give, not them (for they do not desire it), but God the praise.

And thus in the eleven years that have elapsed since the foundation of this House, it has helped some two thousand five hundred persons. Do not say, “What is this, as compared with the misery, the dis-

tress, the want and woe, of this great metropolis of ours?" Or if you do say so, why then, enlarge your gifts, open wide your hands, and the two thousand five hundred of the last eleven years may be the five thousand, or the ten thousand, of the next eleven. Indeed it is most earnestly desired to extend its benefits to classes whom yet it does not reach, as you will see at large in the papers which have been placed within your reach, and which I would earnestly desire that you would peruse at your leisure.

But, indeed, do not say, "What are two thousand five hundred relieved?" As compared with the unrelieved, they may, alas, be few; but in themselves how large, how blessed a company! Numbers are cold and heartless, I had almost said cruel, things; we must ever seek to get at the humanity that is behind them. Think only of some *one* weary wayfarer on the road of life, weary and heavy laden, ready to lie down and die, in miserable doubt whether there is any love for him on earth, or any love for him in Heaven—in the heart of God or in the hearts of men—let such a one be drawn by the providence of God within the walls of the House of Charity; let him find there kind and sympathising friends; counsel, and comfort, and help; shelter for the present, and, it may be, an opening for the future—will he not take courage again? will he not see, and rightly, in this love of men, a witness for the love of God,

who only could have put this love into their hearts ? will he not manfully and hopefully gird up his loins again for the battle of life ; and address himself to its task and toil, quite another man, far better and far braver than he would have been, but for his passing sojourn there ?

Or imagine some young widow, reduced suddenly to abject distress. If she can wait a little while, perhaps some way of life will open to her ; but she cannot afford to wait that little while. Hunger is already at the door ; nay, it has entered in by the door, and has seized her and her little ones. There is one way indeed, a way only too easy, of escape from present want. Is it nothing to have saved her from this ? from the first fatal step, which would have joined her with the ghastly company of those lost ones, who for a little while haunt our streets, and then go down to the chambers of death by those steep stairs of infamy and scorn and shame, which lead for these unhappy ones so swiftly and so inevitably there.

But enough. I now leave the matter in your hands. I will only remind you of the words of the Lord Jesus, how that He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," and with this, further remind you of a fact which I am persuaded all experience bears out, namely, that if men will not give, God will *take*. How often do we see men with-

holding more than is meet, how often have we done so ourselves, but not to our gain. A false friend, or a breaking bank, or an unfaithful steward, or a disastrous fire, or a prodigal child, or an inexplicable panic, or one of the thousand accidents of life, has swept away in an hour the unjust savings of years. Accidents I-called them, but they are nothing of the kind. Because we would not *give*, therefore God *took*—took, and left no blessing behind Him, as He would have done, if we had freely opened our hand. It is to this free giving, which *has* the blessing, that you are invited this day—to a plenteous sowing now, that you may inherit a plenteous reaping hereafter.